



Health impacts of wildfires

Author(s): Finlay SE, Moffat A, Gazzard R, Baker D, Murray V
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Abstract:

Introduction Wildfires are common globally. Although there has been considerable work done on the health effects of wildfires in countries such as the USA where they occur frequently there has been relatively little work to investigate health effects in the United Kingdom. Climate change may increase the risk of increasing wildfire frequency, therefore there is an urgent need to further understand the health effects and public awareness of wildfires. This study was designed to review current evidence about the health effects of wildfires from the UK standpoint. **Methods** A comprehensive literature review of international evidence regarding wildfire related health effects was conducted in January 2012. Further information was gathered from authors' focus groups. **Results** A review of the published evidence shows that human health can be severely affected by wildfires. Certain populations are particularly vulnerable. Wood smoke has high levels of particulate matter and toxins. Respiratory morbidity predominates, but cardiovascular, ophthalmic and psychiatric problems can also result. In addition severe burns resulting from direct contact with the fire require care in special units and carry a risk of multi-organ complications. The wider health implications from spreading air, water and land pollution are of concern. Access to affected areas and communication with populations living within them is crucial in mitigating risk. **Conclusion** This study has identified factors that may reduce public health risk from wildfires. However more research is needed to evaluate longer term health effects from wildfires. An understanding of such factors is vital to ensure preparedness within health care services for such events.

Source: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3492003>

Resource Description

Early Warning System:

resource focus on systems used to warn populations of high temperatures, extreme weather, or other elements of climate change to prevent harm to health

A focus of content

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Extreme Weather Event

Extreme Weather Event: Wildfires

Geographic Feature:

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal



resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Global or Unspecified

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Cardiovascular Effect, Injury, Mental Health/Stress, Morbidity/Mortality, Respiratory Effect

Cardiovascular Effect: Heart Attack, Other Cardiovascular Effect

Cardiovascular Disease (other): cardiovascular mortality

Mental Health Effect/Stress: Mood Disorder, Stress Disorder

Respiratory Effect: Asthma, Other Respiratory Effect

Respiratory Condition (other) : respiratory symptoms: dyspnoea, cough, chest tightness, wheeze and sputum production

Medical Community Engagement:

resource focus on how the medical community discusses or acts to address health impacts of climate change

A focus of content

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Review

Resilience:

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

Timescale:

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified